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FROM THE DESK OF THE DDSN MEDICAL CONSULTANT

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:



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MRSA

SENSIBLE WAYS TO BE PROTECTED

Recently there has been a lot of news about MRSA. The TV and newspapers make it sound as though we have a new and dangerous bug that is very threatening. However, if we take sensible steps in our care everyday, then our consumers, our families, and ourselves can be protected.

Staph Bacteria

Staphylococcus aureus, which we usually call Staph, is a common bacteria on humans. One third of us has it on our skin or in our nose and do not have any illness or problems from it. This is called colonization and is very common.

Sometimes staph causes skin infection. This is usually mild but may lead to a boil or abscess. More serious staph infections can cause surgical infections, pneumonia, or even blood infection. These do not happen as often as the skin or soft tissue infections.

Penicillin was a great drug to stop staph infections but staph can change and resist the effect of antibiotics. By 1969 there were some staphs that were not sensitive to penicillin and the special penicillin called Methicillin. These are Methicillin Resistant Staph Aureus or MRSA and we have been used to treating them with other antibiotics particularly in hospitals and health areas. Recently some of the staph has developed a nasty pattern of resistance and other changes that mean that they can cause infections that can be serious. These bacteria are appearing in the community and are labeled Community Associated MRSA (CA-MRSA). They will need us to treat them with antibiotics and care if we have the infections but also we can stop their spread. Staph all spread the same way and simple care can make a big difference to whether we become infected.

Spread of Staph

Staph infections are spread by physical contact with the bacteria. Mostly this is person to person by touch but some bacteria can be spread by a person's contact with surfaces, personal items, and equipment that have the bacteria left from another person. If there is a skin opening then the staph may enter, if there is not, then it can colonize the skin. Washing hands is the most important and best way of preventing infection.

Covering of any cut, crack or opening of the skin will protect from staph skin infection. Anyone who has a staph infection will need to cover it so that it does not spread bacteria.

Preventing Spread of Staph (in particular MRSA)

- ♦ We all need to wash our hands often. We need to wash with warm water and soap for 15 to 20 seconds; washing and rubbing. Ordinary soap is best; antibacterial soap is more likely to cause skin reactions. Dirty hands need a good wash. Alcohol sanitizers in forms, gels, or wipes can be used to clear bacteria on hands that are not dirty.
- ♦ We need to avoid sharing personal items like razors, toothbrushes, and towels.
- ♦ Skin cuts, scrapes, and breaks should be kept clean and dry to reduce chance of developing infections. Cover them if contact with other people or surfaces is likely.
- ♦ All infected skin or wounds should be covered to prevent spread of the bacteria causing the infection. If a wound infection cannot be covered, the person may need to avoid contact with others.
- ♦ Dressing wounds will need care and good hand washing afterwards.

Care of Staph Infection

- ♦ We need to be careful to cover the infected area and to dispose of the dressing (wrapped up) in the trash. We need to wash our hands after handling any infected area.
- ♦ With skin infections, please get health care advice if the area is red, has spreading redness, has black center and redness (looks like a spider bite), has swelling, tenderness, discharge, or pus.
- ♦ Boils and abscesses may need drainage by being incised (cut open).
- ♦ Laboratory tests to find the type of bacteria can help.
- ♦ Antibiotics may be needed. If they are prescribed, please use the whole course. If we stop early, there may be some resistant bacteria left and the staph in particular may become more resistant if only partly treated.
- ♦ If the area does not start healing in 2-3 days, please review it with your health team.
- ♦ The person with the infection and everyone helping needs to be very good at washing hands.
- ♦ A person who has infection or pus may shed bacteria on clothes, towels, and sheets. At this time, it can be sensible to wash their clothes, towels, and bed sheets in hot water and dry on hot cycle.
- ♦ If the infection comes back, please cover, wash hands, and get advice.

If we take care and always wash hands, we can reduce many infections. Washing hands will help us reduce the risk of MRSA. Covering of infections and protection of skin gouges, cuts, and cracks is important and careful covering and watching and treatment of infections will help us all be less at risk.